

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
of**

**Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Chairman Paul D. Tonko**

***Hearing on “No Time to Waste: Solutions for America’s Broken Recycling System”***

**June 30, 2022**

Earlier this morning, the Supreme Court limited EPA’s authority to protect public health and the environment in the face of Congressional intent for a rule that is no longer on the books and never went into effect.

I am completely dismayed by this decision, and I know in the days ahead this Subcommittee will study the decision and examine all options, while urging EPA to take renewed action however possible to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

But back to the topic of the hearing, today is an opportunity to examine four proposals to address our nation’s waste and recycling challenges.

The American public likes recycling, but many people have concerns that what they put out to the curb often does not end up being recycled.

These concerns are not unfounded. Far too many recyclable products end up in landfills, and plastic waste in particular is ending up in our environment and oceans.

This Subcommittee held an oversight hearing in 2020 to better understand these issues.

We learned that in recent years our nation’s recyclers have been under financial pressure. The closure of the Chinese export market has had major impacts on the U.S. recycling system, causing municipalities to scale back once profitable programs, many of which are now actually costing local governments money.

These changing market conditions exposed deficiencies in domestic markets, education, and infrastructure that had been long overlooked as long as China was willing to accept our waste.

In order to get us back on track, in last year’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress recognized the struggling conditions of municipal recycling systems, and included \$275 million for recycling and waste infrastructure grants and \$75 million for education and outreach grants.

I believe these investments will be complementary to the proposals that will be discussed today, which seek to address many of those challenges previously identified.

H.R. 8059, a bipartisan bill from Representatives Neguse, Burchett, and Foster, seeks to improve recycling data collection, harmonization, and reporting to allow us to better understand the state of our nation's recycling and composting systems.

H.R. 8183, a bipartisan bill from Ranking Member McKinley and Representative Sherrill, would authorize a pilot program at EPA to provide assistance to improve recycling accessibility, with the majority of funds going toward underserved communities.

Subtitles A through D of Title IX of the CLEAN Future Act propose a suite of policies to reduce waste and improve recycling.

This includes grants for community-led zero-waste initiatives, funding for greater consumer education and outreach, requirements for manufacturers to design products to reduce environmental and health impacts, requirements for EPA to standardize labeling guidelines, and the establishment of a national bottle deposit program and a task force to recommend design criteria for a national extended producer responsibility program.

Similarly, H.R. 2238, the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act from Representative Lowenthal offers a comprehensive set of policy solutions to reduce the production and use of plastic products.

Today, the amount of plastic products actually being recycled is pitiful, and yet we are relying more and more on plastic for packaging and other single-use products.

Many of those products are used for only a few minutes before being sent to a landfill, where, under the best-case scenario, they will sit for many lifetimes, but all too often will find a way into our environment and even our food supply.

Both the CLEAN Future Act and the *Break Free* bill would move us in the direction of requiring the companies that produce this future waste to have greater responsibility for its proper recycling or disposal.

Several states and foreign countries are establishing Extended Producer Responsibility programs, and I believe it would be wise for us to do the same.

But ultimately no single policy or program will fix our recycling system. It is going to take many complementary efforts, examples of which will be discussed today.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the most effective steps Congress and EPA can take to improve our nation's recycling and waste management systems.